



The LEADING LADY

by GERALDINE BONNER
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THE STORY

PROLOGUE—While respondent over the enforced hiding of her fiancé, Jim Dallas, slayer in self-defense of Homer Parkinson, member of an influential family, Sybil Saunders, popular actress, is engaged to play Viola Night on Gull Island, on the Maine coast. In the company are Sybil's bosom friend, Anne Tracy; Anne's brother Joe, young wastrel; and Aleck Stokes, an actor infatuated with Sybil.

CHAPTER I—After the play, which is a big hit, Wally Shine, official photographer, learns something of the jealousy, professional and otherwise, existing in the company.

CHAPTER II—Hugh Bassett, director of the play, and Anne Tracy, fiancee, tells Joe he has heard he is spying on Sybil in an effort to learn the whereabouts of Jim Dallas and earn the reward offered by the Parkinson family. The boy's denial is not convincing.

CHAPTER III—Joe Tracy is arranging for a vacation trip. To Anne he betrays his enmity toward Sybil. Stokes tells Sybil he has heard he is spying on Sybil in an effort to learn the whereabouts of Jim Dallas and earn the reward offered by the Parkinson family. The boy's denial is not convincing.

CHAPTER IV—The sound of a pistol shot started the assembled company. Investigation shows a revolver has been taken from a desk in the library. Flora Stokes' wife bursts in with the announcement that Sybil has been shot and her body carried off by the swift tide that races by the island.

CHAPTER V—Flora Stokes tells Bassett she saw Sybil shot but did not see the murderer. Bassett notifies the sheriff, Abel Williams. He arrives with Rawson, district attorney, and a man called Patrick. All the company is accounted for with the exception of Joe Tracy, presumably on his trip. Flora gives her evidence, and the authorities arrange so that no one can leave the island.

CHAPTER VI—Bassett was prepared for what he had to tell. During the long wait for the officers of the law his mind had been ranging over it, shaking bare from unnecessary detail the chain of events that had ended in murder. It was impossible to conceal the situation between Sybil and the Stokeses; he could not if he had wished it. A girl had been brutally done to death, a girl innocent of any evil intention, and his desire to bring her murderer to justice was as strong as either Williams' or Rawson's. And

they could get the facts better from him than from the muddled stories of the others, their minds clouded by prejudice and hearsay. He hoped that what he said would be coldly unbiased, the naked truth as he knew it. That his revelations could involve a woman whom he liked and pitied did not induce him to withhold what ought to be known. Chivalry had no place in this great drama.

Sitting by the desk in the library he unveiled the situation, what he had heard, seen and knew. The man gave an unwinking attention, now and then stopping him to plant a question. The trend of Williams' thoughts was soon revealed—he suspected Flora Stokes. When the matter was thrashed out he came to an open admission with the remark:

"Well, you have only one person here who had the provocation necessary to commit murder."

Bassett made no answer. If his duty required him to tell all he knew, it did not require him to give his own opinions.

Rawson, who was smoking, his long, loose-jointed frame slouched down in an armchair, took his cigar from his mouth.

"Of course, the woman's the first person you'd think of. She had the necessary provocation and the state of mind. But the way she came in, an old maid—Mr. Bassett describes it—doesn't look to me like a guilty person."

"Why not?"

"Sounds too genuine, too like real excitement."

"Don't you think it's natural to get excited if you've killed someone?"

"Yes, but not just that way." Williams leaned over the arm of his chair.

"You got to remember something about these people, Rawson—and it counts big—they're all actors."

Bassett spoke up quickly:

"No, she wasn't acting. You'd have known that if you'd seen her. What she did was natural—a woman suffering from a fearful shock."

"Couldn't an actor put that on?"

"Yes, some could, but I'm certain she wasn't."

"When Stokes came into the

room after the shot," said Rawson, "how did he behave?"

"He seemed all right. But I can't honestly say that I noticed him much."

"Oh, rubbish!" Williams made a rolling motion in the scoop of the big chair. "You can't suspect the man; he was in love with her. He didn't want to kill her, he wanted to keep her alive."

"Men do kill the women they love, especially when they can't get her."

"Yes, they do. I've known of such cases. But that's impulse. This was premeditated." The sheriff pointed at the revolver lying on the desk. "Some time today somebody located that gun, took it for a purpose—hot to shoot seagulls as you thought, Mr. Bassett."

Rawson looked at the pistol. "Premeditation, all right. Was there anybody in the outfit who didn't know you'd opened that drawer and found the revolver gone?"

"Stokes didn't know. He came in after I'd got through asking him if he'd seen any one just as we heard Mrs. Stokes' scream."

"And she didn't, of course," commented Williams.

"While you were running round at the Point, the house was empty?"

"I think Mrs. Stokes was here all the time. I never saw her outside."

"Any of the others come up?"

"I'm not certain of all of them. I know Shine did. I sent him back to phone over to Halworth for the boats. And Stokes did; he came up for the electric torch when I was in here telephoning to you."

"Then neither of them knew the loss of the revolver had been discovered and they had plenty of opportunity to return it to the desk?"

Bassett nodded, and after a minute's cogitation Rawson went on:

"Doesn't it seem odd to you that no one saw Miss Saunders when she came back to the house?"

"No. They were all in their rooms, except Shine, who was down at the Point, and Mrs. Stokes, who was reading on the balcony. I asked her particularly if she'd noticed Sybil pass and she said no, she'd been interested in her book and wouldn't have noticed anybody."

"I'd give a good deal to know what Miss Saunders did in that time. I think it would let in some light."

"How so?"

Rawson narrowed his eyes in contemplation of an unfolding line of thought.

"Well, what took her out again to the Point after she's come in? She hadn't a good deal of time and she wanted to change her clothes before supper. It looks to me as if she met some one in the house, some one who wanted her to go down there with them."

"Mrs. Cornell says she was alone."

"She might have started alone and gone to meet them."

"Then it couldn't have been Stokes," said Williams. "Mr. Bassett says she wouldn't speak to him if she could help it."

(Continued on Page Six)

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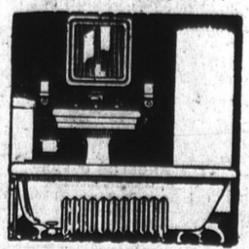
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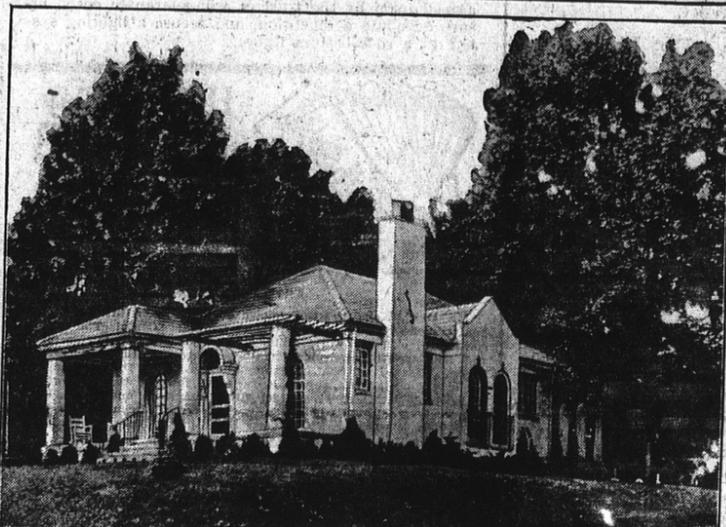
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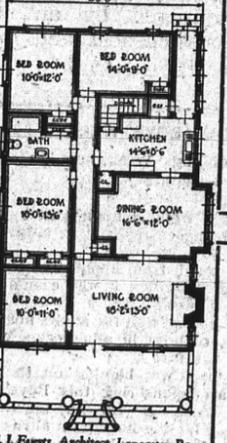
SEVEN ROOMS WELL ARRANGED

The white portland cement stucco on this surprisingly roomy bungalow harmonizes charmingly with its background of green foliage. The idea of wooded surroundings is enhanced by the clinging vines which are permitted to climb the columns forming the front porch. The location of this home, on a sloping corner in Lancaster Pa., permits landscaping that is indeed attractive.

Eighteen windows in seven rooms permit plenty of daylight. Many of these have the half-circle tops and iron grilles so typical of Spanish design. Two of the windows off the dining room are contained in a short wing, the gabled top of which breaks the roof lines pleasingly.

In the interior the entire left side of the house is occupied by four bedrooms, two of which have cross ventilation. The living room, just off the front entrance, contains a large fireplace and has a double entrance to the dining room. The kitchen is ideally situated adjacent to the dining room, and convenient to the rear entrance. The use of permanent construction materials in this house cost very little more than would less durable construction and effectively reduced repair and maintenance expense for years to come.

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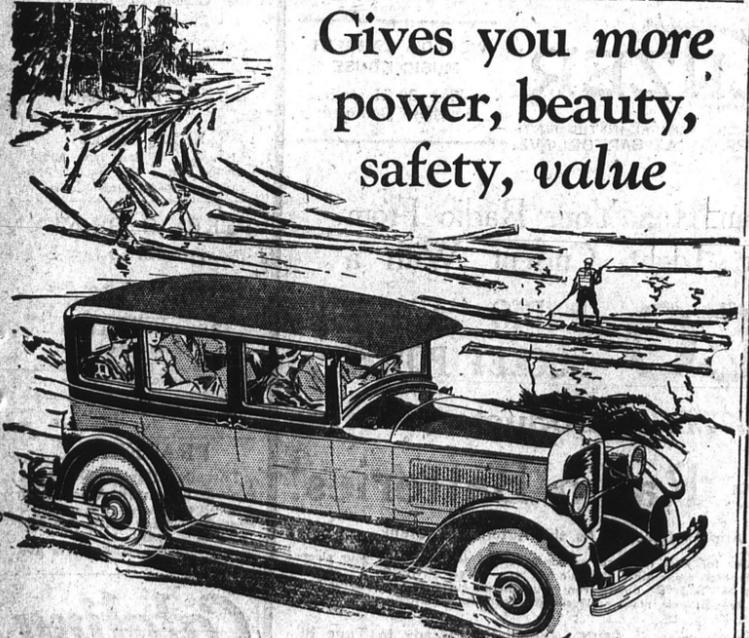


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